

to describe how one U.S. organization, Catholic Relief Services, is making a difference in the lives of such children in the African nation of Benin.

We can all be proud of the work that Catholic Relief Services does in our name around the world. CRS is known for its integrated approach to development, weaving together programs that help poor nations address the challenges of hunger, malnutrition, illiteracy, and poverty. At the same time, CRS promotes community participation, empowerment, and economic opportunity.

In 2001 and 2002, CRS received funding through the United States Department of Agriculture's McGovern-Dole food for education pilot program to begin school feeding programs in six districts in northwestern Benin. The problems facing Benin are daunting. It ranks extremely low on the United Nations human development index, at number 147 out of 162 countries. In the region where CRS is carrying out this program, families engage mainly in farming and fishing, with annual incomes of around \$175. During the long dry season, the food security situation becomes very tight, even by Benin standards. Only about 30 percent of parents send their children to school.

Facing these realities, the CRS-Benin school feeding program began by strengthening or creating parent-teacher associations in order to increase local commitment to education. These PTAs became involved in providing meals to schools, reaching out and encouraging local families to send their children to school, and determining how to meet basic needs regarding the number and quality of teachers. In 61 schools, the CRS-Benin program provided daily school breakfasts and lunches to nearly 9,000 children each day. It also targeted 3,500 female students for take-home rations as an incentive to increase school attendance by girls. Additional rice and soybean oil were awarded to girls who achieved at least an 85 percent attendance rate each quarter. Summer school and other programs were initiated to meet the needs of displaced or otherwise crisis-affected children.

As part of its integrated approach to development, the CRS-Benin program monetized USDA-provided soybeans to fund a number of other critical interventions for these students, including micronutrient supplements to improve student health; hygiene, health and nutrition education for parents and teachers; school latrines and other sanitation infrastructure; training for teachers and school directors in improved teaching and school management methods; and community awareness campaigns on the importance of education for girls.

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The CRS-Benin program also works with the World Health Organization and other NGOs to administer deworming pills to the students in these schools.

In just 2 years, the program has achieved increased student attendance and enrollment, especially for girls; decreased dropout rates; and increased community participation in the schools, including contributions of local foods by families to supplement the U.S.-provided commodities. Some schools have started school gardens or farms in support of the school kitchens. And parents have showed new and improved problem-solving skills tackling such matters as teacher recruitment, improving school classrooms and buildings, and lobbying local Education Ministry officials for more teachers.

Last year the CRS-Benin program received 2 more years of funding through the McGovern-Dole program. CRS-Benin received approximately \$4.1 million in rice, lentils, and sunflower oil from farmers in Colorado, Texas, Tennessee, and Kansas. The program now reaches 12,500 school children, and its achievement can only expand and solidify.

Under the McGovern-Dole pilot program, CRS once carried out similar programs in Albania, Bosnia, Guatemala, and Honduras. Deep funding cuts in the McGovern-Dole program, however, resulted in the survival of only the Benin program. Sadly, more than 95,000 children in the other four countries are now cut off from these vital food, education and health services.

I want to express my admiration and respect for the national and field staff of the Catholic Relief Services and their partners, who carry out these important programs in Benin and elsewhere. They deserve our support and they require more funding.

Madam Speaker, there is no better investment we can make for a more stable world than in the education and well-being of our children, both here at home and around the globe. I urge the congressional leadership of this House to significantly increase the fiscal year 2005 funding for the USDA McGovern-Dole program and for other USDA and USAID food programs.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mrs. BLACKBURN). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. BURTON) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. BURTON of Indiana addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

#### ORDER OF BUSINESS

Mr. BILIRAKIS. Madam Speaker, I ask unanimous consent to take my special order at this time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Florida?

There was no objection.

#### FIGHTING FOR AMERICA'S VETERANS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. BILIRAKIS) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. BILIRAKIS. Madam Speaker, some military retirees, individuals who are eligible for military retirement benefits as a result of a full-service career, are also eligible for disability compensation from the VA based on a medical problem they incurred while in the service. Due to a 19th Century law, these service-disabled retirees must surrender a portion of their retired pay if they want to receive the disability compensation to which they are entitled.

Nationwide more than 550,000 disabled military retirees have been required to give up their retired pay in order to receive their VA disability compensation. For nearly 2 decades, Madam Speaker, I have introduced legislation to correct this longstanding problem, commonly known as concurrent receipt, in the House of Representatives.

Last year our Republican Congress and President George W. Bush reached an historic agreement that changes the 100-year-old practice of having disabled veterans pay for their VA disability out of their military retirement. The new law greatly expands the Combat-Related Special Compensation Program, which we refer to as CRSC, by repealing the 60 percent minimum disability requirement which was set forth in the 2003 Defense Authorization Act. Effective January 1, 2004, earlier this year, CRSC is payable to any military retiree, including personnel who qualify for reserve retirement, who has at least 20 years of service, a Purple Heart and/or injuries sustained while performing military duty in a combat situation or with military equipment or during military training. Retirees must apply to their military service for CRSC payments, but there is no phase-in period for the CRSC benefit.

The new law also phases in full concurrent receipt benefits over the next 10 years for those who have service-connected disabilities rated 50 percent or higher. In addition, the law extends concurrent receipt and CRSC coverage to Reserve and National Guard retirees who were inadvertently excluded from the CRSC program when it was originally enacted. I am pleased to report that on February 1 approximately 150,000 disabled retirees began receiving their new benefits.

Unfortunately, Madam Speaker, the issue of concurrent receipt has become something of a "political football." Some of my Democratic colleagues have been working hard to convince our Nation's veterans that they are truly dedicated to keeping America's promise to them. I find it highly ironic that these Members are now commending themselves for their recent leadership on an issue that I have been